



Bernice Zamora

“

I find it necessary to record in my poetry the terror women and children pose, the tyranny with which men rule, and religion's role in this ancient art of tyranny over women's children and women's truth.

— Silence at Bay

”

Quick Facts

- * Born in 1938
- * Chicana poet, editor, essayist, and academic
- * Author of *Restless Serpents* (1979)

Biography

Bernice Zamora (born Bernice Ortiz) originates from south central Colorado at the foot of the East Spanish Peak, volcanic conduits she refers to in her poetry. Zamora attended primarily parochial schools in Denver and Pueblo, Colorado. She spoke Spanish with grandparents and older relatives, but the language at home and school was English.

At the age of 28, with a husband and two children to care for, Zamora made the decision to enroll in college studying English at Southern Colorado State College. After earning a B.A. in three years, Zamora began her graduate studies at Stanford while simultaneously writing literary criticisms, poems and stories for an assortment of Chicano journals and teaching part-time at the University of California, Berkley. It wasn't until the publication of *Restless Serpents*, published jointly with José Antonio Burciaga, that her writing began to “arouse widespread interest.” Since then, Zamora has been the guest editor of the Chicano literary journal *El Fuego de Aztlán*, editor of the Chicano journal *De Colores*, and co-editor of an anthology of short stories, oral histories and poetry from the 1970s Chicano Flor y Canto literature festivals. In 1986, Zamora received her PhD from Stanford University and began her position in the English Department of Santa Clara University in 1990, where she remains today.

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Biography continued

Although she has explored many genres of writing, Zamora prefers poetry, and in fact claims she is “compelled or driven to write it.” Her writing is most significantly influenced by the Chicano Movement, the attempt by members of the Chicano community to organize local and regional concerns with the common goal of empowerment. Considering the role politics and social concern play in writing, it is no surprise that the Chicano Movement had a catalyzing affect, stimulating the production for many Chicanos searching for a voice.

Drawing her motivation from the Movement, Zamora’s poetry examines socially relevant themes including women’s rights and recovering the traditions and values of Chicano heritage and the Penitentes Brotherhood. Using unique control and structure in her work, as in *Restless Serpents*, Zamora intertwines her themes to create a mature and realistic retrospective of Chicano life evaluating the American values of freedom, justice and equality.

Bernice Zamora’s first collection of poetry, *Restless Serpents*, was published in 1979. This project was a collaboration of poems composed with the late José Antonio Burciago, in which seventy-four pages were Zamora’s poems and sixty-four pages were Burciago’s poems. In the same year, she became a co-editor with José Armas of *De Colores Journal*. During the following year, Bernice Zamora published *Flor y Canto VI and V: An Anthology of Chicano Literature from the Festivals held in Albuquerque, New Mexico, 1977 and Tempe, Arizona, 1978*, which she co-edited with José Armas and Michael Reed. Zamora then started to write a monologue series. A little over a decade later, the “Tere” series was published in the *New Chicano/Chicana Writing I* by an editor named Charles Tatum.

Eventually she went back to publishing poems and published her second collection, *Releasing Serpents*, in 1994. Bernice Zamora’s most recent books of poetry include *Recalling Richard* and *Bellow*. Both collections were to be published in 1997. During the same year, she wrote a monologue for “Chicana Monologues for Actors” and her essay “Silence at Bay” was published in Lucha Corpi’s book, *Máscaras*. In 1998, the editors of *Floricanto Sí!* were the first to publish her poems “Contraries” and “Glint.”

Over the years Bernice Zamora has written literary articles, reviews, short stories, critical essays, and monologues. Zamora’s work has since been published in countries such as Mexico, Italy, France, and Germany.



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Selected Bibliography

Works by the author

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